



STATE OF TENNESSEE
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37243-0435

ROBERT J. MARTINEAU, JR.
COMMISSIONER

BILL HASLAM
GOVERNOR

May 13, 2016

Via Electronic Mail to *Comments-southern-chokeee-watauga@fs.fed.us*

Keith Kelley
District Ranger
Watuaga Ranger District
4400 Unicoi Drive
Unicoi, TN 37692

Dear Keith Kelley:

The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the United States Forest Service (USFS) *Categorical Exclusion for Rhodo Cove Forest Health Project and the Rhodo Cove Prescribed Burn Project* (CE) in Carter County, Tennessee. The applicant, USFS, proposes to improve the vegetation of the proposed area by thinning the stands with variable density to a range of basal areas from 35 to 60 sq. ft. per acre and to develop open woodland conditions and create mixed hardwood/pine system through low intensity burn. In order to access several stands, ¼ mile of temporary road construction will be needed in order to complete the proposed thinning. This proposal is categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or an Environmental Impact Statement pursuant to 36 C.F.R. 220.6(e)(12)¹ and 36 C.F.R. 220.6 (e)(6).²

TDEC's **Tennessee State Parks and Real Property Management** has reviewed the CE and has no specific comments regarding the proposed action or its alternatives.

TDEC's **Division of Natural Areas (DNA)** has reviewed the CE and, based on the information provided and the information within the rare species database, comments that the proposed actions may potentially impact the Manhart's Sedge (*Carex manhartii*), a state endangered species. DNA recommends that this rare sedge be considered during the planning of the proposed actions and that efforts be made to minimize impacts to this species should it be found in the immediate project area.

TDEC's **Division of Air Pollution Control (APC)** has reviewed the CE and recommends that USFS conduct the opening burning activities in a manner to encourage good smoke dispersion and in accordance with the state open burning regulatory requirements.³ APC also recommends that USFS follow a smoke management plan, have trained staff conduct and manage any burns, and alert local, county and state forestry offices when planned burns are to be conducted.

TDEC appreciates the opportunity to comment on this CE. Please note that these comments are not indicative of approval or disapproval of the proposed action or its alternatives, nor should they be interpreted as an indication

¹ 36 C.F.R. 220.6(e)(12) states that "harvest of live trees not to exceed 70 acres, requiring no more than ½ mile of temporary road construction."

² 36 C.F.R. 220.6(e)(6) states that "timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities that do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction."

³ Information on Tennessee opening burning regulatory requirements is available at <http://www.burnsafetn.org/> and <https://tn.gov/environment/article/apc-open-burning>.

regarding future permitting decisions by TDEC. Please contact me should you have any questions regarding these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kendra Abkowitz". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Kendra Abkowitz
Director of Policy and Planning
Phone: (615)-532-8689

cc:

Bill Avant, TDEC, TSP
Stephanie A. Williams, TDEC, DNA
Lacey Hardin, TDEC, APC